

Testimony
The University of Texas System
House Higher Education Committee
March 1, 2017

***Delivered remarks often deviate from prepared remarks*

My name is Steve Leslie and I am the Executive Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs for The University of Texas System.

UT System is the largest University System in Texas, by any measure.

- Our Operating budget at \$17.9 Billion is four (4) times larger than the next closest System.
- We have over 100,000 employees Systemwide in Texas
- Our annual research expenditures totaled more than \$2.6 Billion in 2015
- We enroll more than 221,000 students
- We awarded more than 54,000 degrees last year, conferring more than 1/3 of all Undergraduate degrees awarded in Texas and almost 2/3 of the state's healthcare professionals.
- 41% of the UT System degrees are awarded in STEM + Health fields (33.1% Texas Public Avg.); and our health institutions provided 7.4 Million outpatient visits in 2015.

We are a diverse system, with three comprehensive universities, four emerging research institutions, and a flagship that is recognized globally as the top Texas public university. We have six medical schools; including UT MD Anderson, which is universally recognized as the world's leading cancer center; and we host one of only two National Biocontainment Laboratories in the nation. UT System was recently recognized by Reuters as the *Most Innovative Higher Education System* in the U.S.

At UT System Administration, we focus on leveraging our size, diversity and quality. In contrast to other systems, we centralize many functions to maximize efficiency and cost-effectiveness and we manage University Lands for the benefit of both the UT and Texas A&M systems.

UT System is engaged in several Systemwide programs to ensure that Texas students have access to higher education and to promote their success once enrolled. These strategic goals which we call "Quantum Leaps", are among the specific challenges Chancellor McRaven has charged UT System to address. Access is essential not just for the benefit of the individual students, but for Texas overall. The global and national economies are increasingly knowledge-based, and higher education is essential to Texas remaining economically competitive on a national and global scale.

We believe improved access begins with a focus on the educational pipeline, for which we have launched the Texas Prospect Initiative. This initiative is being led by **Rebecca Karoff**, Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs. Dr. Karoff has joined me at the hearing and can answer specific questions you may have regarding the student success initiatives I am about to outline in my testimony.

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Through unprecedented collaboration and partnerships, we are working aggressively to increase the number of students who are prepared for success in college, which includes producing the most qualified teachers for Texas schools. This involves partnerships with pre-K through 12th grade schools, as well as with community colleges. For example, we are partnering with the Texas Association of Community Colleges to convene a Statewide Dual Credit Task Force, to study those programs that allow students to earn credits for both high school and college in the same course.

Of course, access is both an issue of preparation as well as of cost. What do we do about costs?

- First, we keep administrative costs low. All of our institutions have administrative costs at or below the state average. In addition, we have implemented a plan at System Administration to reduce our own FTE count by 10% in the current fiscal year (2016-2017).
- Second, our regents tightly control tuition increases, with some of the lowest average annual changes in Texas over the last six years.
 - Tuition and fees at most of our institutions are at or below that of our national peers
 - Tuition and fees at UT Austin are less than University of Houston, Texas Tech, Texas State, and others, and rank 14th out of 15 national peers (about ½ the cost of Penn State)
 - UTEP has the lowest average net price among all U.S. research universities
 - UT Permian Basin guarantees four years' free tuition and fees for Pell-eligible students with a family income of less than \$45,000
 - UTSA, an emerging research university, has reduced its net price to students over the last three years
- Third, over 60 percent of UT System full-time undergraduates receive non-loan financial aid, covering 100% of tuition and fees for families making less than \$60,000 and 2/3 of the cost for families making \$80,000 or more.
 - For those students who borrow money—more than ½ of our students—they borrow less than the state and national average and their student loan payments average less than \$200 a month
- Finally, we recognize that cost is not entirely about tuition and fees, and just as our institutions are diverse, our campuses use a variety of approaches to reduce the cost of higher education. For example:
 - UT Tyler has several programs specifically aimed at reducing time-to-degree, the single biggest factor in reducing the cost of higher education
 - UTRGV uses tuition incentives to increase the number of students taking 15 semester credit hours, which facilitates timely degree completion

We have undertaken another Quantum Leap we call the Student Success initiative, which recognizes three pillars that support student success:

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- Finances: we seek to ensure that no student drops out because of finances
- Advising: high-quality advising is the key to students having a clear pathway to degree completion
- Belonging: no student should be unable to persist or graduate because of a lack of engagement or a sense of not belonging.

Specific projects in support of student success include:

- Graduation help desks—one-stop shops to connect students with the right people and resources to overcome barriers in the path to timely graduation
- Student success compacts—agreements between the university and the student with clear goals and expectations, which guarantee a student graduates in four years or the university pays the additional tuition expense until graduation
- Student engagement initiatives—High Impact Practices, such as on-campus employment, internships, and undergraduate research are experiences that have proven to increase retention while also narrowing achievement gaps.

These strategic initiatives at UT System are in close alignment with the Coordinating Board's 60x30TX plan, which we whole-heartedly support. We are in the process of identifying the goals and targets for UT System institutions to achieve our individual campus responsibilities under that plan, and we have pledged to work shoulder-to-shoulder with all of higher education to achieve that plan's goals.

Thank you. I'd be glad to answer any questions.